

In the wake of **TERROR**



The CGC Tahoma helps enforce the security zone in New York Harbor after the downing of the World Trade Center buildings. (PA2 Tom Sperduto, PADET New York)

U.S. Coast Guard responds to terrorist attacks against America

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Tuesday morning, Sept. 11, 2001, American people nationwide froze in their daily routines to watch in horror and shock as airliners crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Arlington, Va.

Immediately following the attacks, emergency personnel rushed to the scenes to try to save as many lives as they could while nearby Coast Guard units lifted off from flight lines and threw off mooring lines to rush to the scene.

Coast Guard boats from stations New York and Sandy Hook, N.J., along with the 65-foot cutter Hawser from Bayonne, N.J., helped evacuate hundreds of people with minor to serious injuries from lower Manhattan to Liberty State Park in New Jersey, under the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, where a medical staging area was established.

Dozens of commercial tugs, ferries, police and fire boats, local mariners and Coast Guard boats and cutters, including the 175-foot buoy tender Katherine Walker, began a mass evacuation of people off Manhattan within minutes of the incident. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers were evacuated by water.

Two nearby HH-65 helicopters from Coast Guard Air Station Atlantic City, N.J., were also launched to assist with medical evacuations, but were unable to fly into the

area because of poor visibility caused by the smoke and debris.

Across the East Coast and throughout the nation, Coast Guard cutters, aircraft and personnel stood ready to help with medical evacuations and crisis response as needed.

Overnight, more Coast Guard forces mobilized to New York City and Washington to assist local officials with crisis response and safety and security of ports and waterways. By the next day, 12 cutters were on patrol in New York Harbor.

The Coast Guard assisted emergency response agencies in New York City with the transport of medical and logistical personnel and supplies, and led the effort to secure New York Harbor and other ports.

Reserve Coast Guard Port Security Unit 305, based in Fort Eustis, Va., was activated and sent to New York where they were quartered in a tent city on the grounds of Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island. PSU 307 from St. Petersburg, Fla., was also deployed to New York, but was rerouted to Boston.

Nationwide, Coast Guard captains of the port, or COTPs, worked closely with local, state and federal officials, including local port authorities, to increase port safety and security. Baltimore's Inner Harbor and the Washington, D.C., area of the Potomac River were closed periodically to vessel traffic as an added security measure.

Although the Port of New York was closed to commercial and recreational vessel traffic, the Staten Island ferries were able to transport medical and logistical personnel and supplies.

Around Washington, units from Coast Guard Activities Baltimore worked closely with local, state and federal agencies to respond to the crisis there. Patrol boats and aircraft were deployed to patrol Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River and other waterways in the area. Coast Guard cutters, boats and aircraft, including the Coast Guard's Tactical Law Enforcement Teams and PSUs, patrolled ports, harbors and facilities all along the eastern seaboard.

Flight crews maintained around-the-clock readiness for the relief efforts in New York, all the while keeping their normal 24-hour search and rescue status.

During the day Thursday, COTP New York, in conjunction with the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey, reopened New York Harbor to commercial vessel traffic on a case-by-case basis, even as Coast Guard units continued to arrive in the area to maintain port security.

"In the wake of such a tragedy, it's important for us to restart our maritime transportation system -- not only for commerce, but for recovery as well," said Rear Adm. Richard Bennis, COTP New York. "It affects many lives and livelihoods throughout the northeastern United States."

Each vessel was boarded at sea by the Coast Guard and other agencies before entering the port. The vessels were also required to have an escort through the safety and security zones.

A Coast Guard C-130 airplane from Sacramento, Calif., arrived at a suburban New York airport Thursday afternoon with approximately 400 pounds of blood platelets.

On the West Coast, port security was stepped up significantly in the 11th District, where Pacific Area commander Vice Adm. Ernest R. Riutta later echoed President Bush's comments that increased security would be sustained over time.

"Over the past week the Coast Guard has set unprecedented levels of port security," said Riutta. "Business as usual will not be the same as it was prior to Sept. 11."

In Alaska, the Port of Valdez was temporarily closed while security upgrades were put in place. Traffic soon resumed, but with tighter movement constraints, Coast Guard cutter presence, and increased security zones within the port.

Further south, 13th District Headquarters personnel were protected by the increased security of the federal building, but other units throughout the district had to establish their own measures. Concrete barriers staggered the entrances to Coast Guard bases. Some went as far as laying barbed wire across their front gate entrances.

Additional personnel, some armed with shotguns, guarded some of the front gates. In Hawaii, where the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred 60 years before, 14th District Coast Guardsmen were soon armed and patrolling units and housing areas, sometimes alongside soldiers from adjacent commands. The port of Honolulu remained open, but with cutters and smallboats patrolling nearby.

Along the eastern seaboard and in the Gulf of Mexico, many of the Coast Guard's larger cutters were positioned off major ports to ensure waterway security.

Coast Guard units on the Great Lakes worked with other security and law enforcement agencies to actively patrol "areas of high risk" along the Great Lakes.

A joint team from the U.S. and Canadian coast guards boarded all foreign-flagged ships entering the St. Lawrence Seaway. The team boarded them in Montreal to conduct background checks of each crewmember and check manifests and cargo.

The Coast Guard also issued a temporary regulation establishing new Naval Vessel Protection Zones around all U.S. naval vessels within the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area.

More than one week after the attacks, the Coast Guard continued to provide logistical support and port vessel control as the Port of New York began to work toward returning to normal.

Commercial vessel traffic continued to flow into the Port of New York, though additional reporting requirements and approval were required. Passenger ferry service also resumed the Monday following the tragedy with uniformed security personnel aboard. The port, however, remained closed to cruise ships.

Additional Coast Guard law enforcement officers arrived in New York early the next Tuesday morning from the Coast Guard's 9th District in Cleveland, the 8th District in

New Orleans and the 5th District in Portsmouth, Va. Approximately 1,600 active duty, Reserve and civilian Coast Guard men and women worked around the clock in New York Harbor to support FEMA and New York City officials with rescue efforts and to ensure the safety and security of the port.

Dozens of Coast Guard Auxiliary vessels were also on the water assisting with personnel transfers and providing back-up search and rescue support.

The commandant received authority from the Secretary of Transportation to activate the entire Coast Guard Reserve force for assistance, more than 8,000 members.

Coast Guard waterborne patrols were significantly increased following the attacks, and additional port security measures were put in place by the respective Coast Guard COTPs in every major port and waterway throughout the country.

The tone was set by Vice Adm. Thad Allen, the Atlantic Area commander, at a remembrance ceremony in Norfolk, Va., Sept. 14: "The men and women of the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area, like our fellow servicemembers, the president, the secretary of transportation, and the commandant of the Coast Guard, stand strong in our resolve to serve our country and humanity. We remain devoted to duty -- whatever that duty is, and wherever that duty may take us."

Editor's note: At publication time, most details on the terrorist attacks and resulting activities were unavailable. Watch for more detailed coverage in an upcoming issue of Coast Guard magazine.